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Rousing Romantic Melodrama, 'Anastasia,' Played to the Hilt

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Guy Bolton has been writing plays and musicals since 1911. His latest work, "Anastasia," which he adapted from a French play, could have come in those golden days of his youth in form and manner, if not in historical content. In those days of romantic melodrama, a plot was a plot, an actor was an actor, a scene was a scene and a line was a line. Those were the meat-and-potato days, when such theatrical mountebanks as Belasco, Brady and Woods were thriving and a mood was merely some kind of a fit.

And so, in the dwindling hours of 1954, Bolton came up with "Anastasia" last evening at the Lyceum Theatre—and nothing could be more welcome. Here is Theatre with a capital T—not art, perhaps, but one grand show filled with heroes and heroines and the dark skullduggery of a most enchanting villain. Elaine Perry has given it a fine production, Alan

Eugenie Leontovich
An exquisite old empress

Schneider has directed it with lip-smacking relish, and such actors as Eugenie Leontovich, Viveca Lindfors and Joseph Anthony play it to the hilt. All of it made me feel young again.

History or Fiction

The period of "Anastasia" is somewhat later than the days of Bolton's youth, being the early weeks of 1926. The scene is a house in Berlin, where an exiled Russian prince and two shady associates have been selling stock in a scheme to produce the last living daughter of the Czar and thus lay claim to ten million pounds sterling which the Czar had in foreign banks at the time of the Bolshevik revolution.

The legend of Princess Anastasia is a fascinating one—or is it the truth? There still lives a woman who declares she is the Czarina of All the Russias. Many sober historians have recorded that when the Czar and 10 members of his family were shot in a cellar by the Bolsheviks, one child, Anastasia, was not killed. She was found alive in a pile of bodies in a mine which became the grave of the others, was smuggled out of Russia, and after much suffering from wounds and a long period of amnesia in an asylum, regained her identity.

Lovely Performances

And so, in Berlin in 1926, this former Cossack officer and his two pals, faced with an ultimatum to produce their princess or be jailed for fraud, find a likely girl. A pitifully drab, hungry girl who did in fact once tell people in an asylum that she was Anastasia. They feed her, clothe her, threaten her and coach her in the role she is to assume—for she must pass searching tests, including examination by the Dowager Empress of Russia, who is living in Berlin.

Well, is the girl they found in the play last night a fraud, or is she the real Anastasia? I shan't tell you, because it would be much more fun for you to find out yourself. But I can tell you that Miss Lindfors gives a lovely performance as the waif who gradually takes on regal airs, and Miss Leontovich gives an absolutely exquisite performance as the old empress. And Anthony, as the chief of the ruthless schemers, is the best swashbuckling villain in many a timid Broadway season.

Hurd Hatfield is a great help as Prince Paul, a fortune-hunting cousin who was Anastasia's childhood playmate and sweetheart, and there are colorful performances by David J. Stewart, Boris Tumarin, Sefton Darr and Dorothy Patten. Ben Edwards' setting is in just the right mood for a fine and fruity play.

"ANASTASIA"

Play by Marcelle Maurette, adapted from the French by Guy Bolton and produced by Elaine Perry at the Lyceum Theatre, Dec. 29, 1954.

THE CAST

Chernov	Boris Tumarin
Varya	Sefton Darr
Petrovin	David J. Stewart
Prince Bounine	Joseph Anthony
Sergei	William Callan
Anna	Viveca Lindfors
Counsellor Drivinitz	Carl Low
Sleigh Driver	Stuart Germain
Charwoman	Vivian Nathan
Dr. Siremsky	Michael Strong
Dowager Empress	Eugenie Leontovich
Baroness Livenbaum	Dorothy Patten
Prince Paul	Hurd Hatfield

Musical Comedy Opening Tonight

"House of Flowers," musical comedy with a book by Truman Capote and score by Harold Arlen, comes to the Alvin tonight at 8, under the sponsorship of Saint Subber. Pearl Bailey is starred and Diahann Carroll, Juanita Hall, Ray Walston, Frederick O'Neal, Dino DiLuca, Rawn Spearman and Geoffrey Holder are featured. Capote and Arlen worked on the lyrics together. Peter Brook is credited with the direction.

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